

Christianity best propagated by the
good lives of Christians.

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd before
The Gentlemen Educated
at Merchant Taylors School,

A T
St Mary le Bow, Jan. 16. 1699.

By Sir *WILLIAM DAWES*,
Baronet, D. D. and Chaplain in
Ordinary to His Majesty.

Abp of York

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Christianity best preserved by the
good sense of Christians.

SERMON

The Gentlemen Educated
at Merchant Taylor's School.

At the Anniversary of the
Martyrdom of St. Thomas Becket, 1699.



By SAMUEL WILKINS, D.D.
Baronet, D.D. and Chaplain in
Ordinary to His Majesty.

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St. Paul's Church-yard, and the Booksellers, over against
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To his Honoured
AND
Much Esteemed Friends ,
THE
STEWARDS
OF THE
Feast of Gentlemen Educated at
Merchant Taylors School.

*Tho. Andrews, Esq; Edw. Goldesbrough, Esq;
Mr Henry Butler, Stephen Hervey, Esq;
Rich. Graham, Esq; Mr Benjamin Walford,
Charles Cox, Esq; Cæsar Bradshaw, Esq;*

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Charles Cox, Esq; Cesar Braddon, Esq;
Rich. Graham, Esq; Mr Benjamin Walford,
Mr Henry Butler, Stephen Harte, Esq;
Thos. Andrews, Esq; T. Goldsbrough, Esq;



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S E R M O N

Preach'd before

The Gentlemen Educated

at *Merchant-Taylors School, &c.*

St Matthew, Chap. the 5th, v. 16.
the latter part of the verse,

*That they may see your good works,
and glorify your Father which is in
Heaven.*

IN the former part of this Verse, we find our Blessed Saviour exhorting his Disciples, and in them all other Christians whatsoever, to an unblameable, holy and exemplary conversation. *Let your light, saith he, that is, the light or knowledge of the Gospel which is in you, so shine, or shew forth* itself,

itself, in all the graces and virtues of a true Christian life, *before*, or in the sight of *men*, that they may see *your good works*, not only works of charity, as some too narrowly expound it, but all sorts of good works whatsoever, and be by them excited to glorify *your Father which is in Heaven*.

By which phrase two things may be meant: either, First, that men may be hereby invited to rejoice in, and give thanks and praise to God, for ~~for~~ these visible and glorious effects of his grace and goodness, amongst men; or secondly, that they may hereby be provoked to reform and amend their ~~their~~ lives: *Unbelievers*, to come over the true belief, and *wicked Believers* to the true practice of Christianity: and both by so doing to glorify God, in that way which of all others he most approves, by doing his will, by bearing much fruit, by serving him with their bodies and spirits, which are his.

And both these senses, I make do doubt, were intended in these words; but I shall insist upon the latter only in my following discourse: the whole design and business of which shall be, to make good and apply this useful proposition, which, I think, may very naturally be inferr'd from the words of my Text, viz.

That the unblameable, holy, and exemplary lives of Christians are a very likely means, both of bringing over *Unbelievers*, and converting wicked *Believers*, to a true and stedfast belief and practice of the Christian Religion.

That

That this is true, as to *Unbelievers*, might be sufficiently prov'd from considering: That the holy Scriptures do recommend to Christians this method of converting *Unbelievers*, which, it is most certain, they would not do, were it not fit and proper for this end. Thus we find St. Peter 1 Ep. 3. c. v. 1, 2. exhorting the *Believing* Wife, to win over the *Unbelieving* Husband to the faith, by her chaste conversation. That God, especially having appointed this means for the attainment of this end, will, no doubt, in an extraordinary manner sanctify it by his grace, and make it effectual to it. And lastly, That it is plain from experience, that the growth of Christianity has been always very much owing to this cause: there having been multitudes of *Unbelievers*, as all Ecclesiastical Writers assure us, won over to the faith of Christ, by the incomparable *Piety, Charity, and Sobriety* of the first Christians.

But, because men are generally desirous to see the reasons of things, how they come to pass, and by what natural power each cause produceth its effect, I shall endeavour, as briefly and clearly as I can, to manifest this, as to the point in hand, by these following Considerations: some of which will show, how the holy and exemplary lives of Christians contribute towards the conversion of *Unbelievers*, more remotely, and by distant consequence; others, more directly and immediately. And

First, Let it be consider'd, that the holy and exemplary lives of Christians will naturally attract

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he eyes and thoughts of *Unbelievers*, and, by so doing, probably engage them in some serious reflections upon the Christian Religion, the effects of which they shall plainly perceive to be so glorious and wonderful. Whatsoever is extraordinary and surprizing men are naturally apt to gaze at and admire, and to enquire into the causes and original of; and consequently, the lives of Christians, which, when led according to the Rules of their Religion, are very extraordinary, and vastly beyond any thing that was in the world before, will be very likely to provoke men to a curious observation and examination of them, as also of the grounds and principles from which they proceed. These *burning and shining lights*, cannot fail at least of startling and awakening such as were before in *darkness, and in the shadow of death*: These blessed *fruits of the spirit* cannot fail of perswading men at least to *tast and see how good the Lord is*; and when we have once brought them so far as to tast, there is very little fear of their not liking.

Secondly, The holy and exemplary lives of Christians will be a sure means of recommending them to the favour and esteem, love and friendship of *Unbelievers*: and consequently a sure means of gaining opportunities of conversing familiarly with them, insinuating truth into them, and making them willing and easie to receive it. For there is no man (let him be of what profession or denomination he will) that doth not admire Justice and honest dealing, sincerity and veracity, kindness and Charity ~~where~~ *wheresoever* he finds them; and therefore here can be no doubt but good Christians, who

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must needs be, in a conspicuous manner, eminent for the practice of these and all other virtues, will soon become the darlings of all mankind; obtain a mighty Interest in their opinions and affections, and then, by consequence, a mighty power, both of leading them into, and confirming them in, the knowledge of Christ. Just as it was in the case of *John the Baptist*, who, having first approv'd himself to the world, by the extraordinary sanctity and severity of his life, there immediately *went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan*, and gladly heard his Doctrine, and were forthwith *Baptiz'd of him*.

Thirdly, The holy and exemplary lives of *Christians*, if ever they come to debate the principles of their Religion with *Unbelievers*, will give a mighty weight and advantage to all their Arguments, by taking away all jealousies and suspicions of trickishness, and insincerity in them; whereas our experience assures us, that, let men argue never so well in behalf of Religion, yet if their Arguments are not back'd by their lives, they are seldom, scarce ever, successful. And the reason of this is plain: because the Arguments of such men are always suspected, and, they themselves being manifest Hypocrites, their Arguments generally pass for such too.

Fourthly, The holy and exemplary lives of *Christians* will so powerfully represent to *Unbelievers* the reasonableness and excellency of the *Christian Religion*, as well as the usefulness and advantage of it, towards the present and future happiness, and well-being of mankind, that they cannot fail

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of engaging their affections towards it, and not only strongly incline them to examine into the grounds of it, but even prejudice, and prepossess them in favor of it, and make them wish and desire that it may be true, by shewing them how much it is for their Interest that it should be so. Thus, for Instance,

When they shall see its precepts all exemplify'd in the lives of its Disciples: how capable they are of being practis'd, notwithstanding all the seeming difficulties in the Theory, and how much they tend to exalt and ennoble human nature, when practis'd, by drawing it off from the carnal and sensual, to the rational and spiritual life; they will be constrain'd to acknowledge it a reasonable, constrain'd to wish it a Divine Service.

Again, when by comparing the lives of Christians with those of other men, they shall plainly see how much they do surpass them, in *piety* towards God, *Justice* and *Charity* towards men, and in a Regular and well ordered Government of themselves, their lusts and passions (and this they would soon see, if Christians were but careful to direct their lives according to their Rule) they must needs own, that they have a more excellent Rule of Life to walk by, than other men; and earnestly desire, that this were to be the standing Rule to all Mankind.

Once more, when they shall observe, from sensible and living proofs, how much the Laws of Christianity duly put in execution, tend to preserve the Peace, order, and beauty of the Universe, and the

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particular happiness, and well-being of every member of it ; How contented and useful it makes every man in his own Station : how respectful and obedient to his Superiors, how humble, kind and helpful to his inferiours, how just and beneficent to all ; how utterly it eradicates from the minds of men every *Root of bitterness*, which may make them uneasy either to themselves or others, and how plentifully it inspires them with all those Graces and Virtues, which may serve to promote their own, and their Neighbours happiness ; but, above all, with what sure and glorious hopes it fills them of a blessed immortality, in prospect of which, they are able to triumph over all the miseries and troubles of this present Life, and defy all manner of dangers that may threaten them, nay even Death itself : When, I say, they shall experimentally and sensibly find the conduciveness of the *Christian Religion*, towards these admirable and desirable ends ; how can it be conceiv'd, that they should not straitway fall in Love with it, and eagerly desire to employ themselves in examining those Reasons, and readily give those Arguments their full weight, which serve to confirm them in the truth of it ? And this will put them into an excellent Temper and Disposition for receiving

Lastly, That evidence which the Holy Lives of *Christians* carry in them, of the *truth* and *Divinity* of the *Christian Religion*, and this is very strong and powerful. For

First,

First, It is most highly probable, that that Religion, which so much tends to raise men up into a conformity, and likeness to God, and, as St Peter expresseth it, to make them *partakers of the Divine Nature*, as it is plain from the *Holy Lives of Christians*, the *Christian Religion* doth, had that God for its Author, to whom it is so very like. Were there any thing in the lives of Christians, led according to the Rules of their Religion, either unlike to, or unworthy of, God, this would be a sufficient argument against the Divinity of it; for God certainly can do nothing, either unlike to, or unworthy of, himself. But since every line and feature of a true Christian is exactly answerable and agreeable to all our purest and most refin'd notions of God, it seems highly unreasonable, not to acknowledge him for his Father. But

Secondly, The *Holy Lives of Christians* seem to me to be an infallible demonstration of the Divinity of the *Christian Religion*: it appearing utterly impossible, that any thing less than infinite Wisdom and infinite Power joyn'd together, should be able to raise mens Lives to that perfection, which the *Christian Religion* visibly doth; and consequently that must be infinite wisdom, and infinite power.

In vain, alas! had the wise men of this world, for about four thousand years, exercis'd their wits, in searching out such perfect Rules of living, as shine so illustriously in the lives of true Christians.

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ans. And is it then imaginable that there should come one man at last, wiser than all the world before him, who should be able of himself to atchieve this mighty work? No certainly, the work was more than humane, and not to be accomplish'd but by the infinite and *multifarious wisdom*, which so richly dwelt in our Jesus, who has been in these last days the Author of it. Nothing less than that Scripture, which has been *given us by inspiration of God*, could have been *sufficient for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness, that the man of God might be*, as we now see him, *perfect and thoroughly furnish'd unto all good works.*

And, as our wisdom to find out, so our power to execute, the means of arriving at this perfection was much too short. For, supposing that, of our selves, we could have discover'd those excellent Rules of life which Christians now walk by: yet considering how very disagreeable they are to flesh and blood, and how constantly and how violently they thwart our dearest affections and inclinations, and how many and how potent enemies we must have fought our way through to the observance of them, we cannot but acknowledge it impossible for us ever to have kept them; For it is not in the power of man, consider'd in himself, to be continually fighting against, and bearing down himself: it is not in the power of meer unassist-ed man to wrestle with, and get the victory over, *principalities and powers.* But what the *natural power* of
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of man could not do, that the *supernatural* grace of God has effectually done: and by this we, who of ourselves are *weak*, and *unable to do any good thing*, are made *strong in the Lord*, enabled to do all things, and to go on unto all perfection.

This then I look upon as a standing Miracle to prove the *Divinity* of the *Christian Religion*; namely, the vast change it has made from the carnal to the spiritual man, visible in the lives of all good Christians, and incapable of being effected by any thing less than the Divine Power and Wisdom.

And thus you see plainly how the lives of good Christians do conduce very much towards the conversion of *Unbelievers* to the *Christian Religion*; by inclining them to look into it, gaining opportunities of instructing them in it, representing it amiable and lovely to them, and by preparing them for, and offering to them, not only probable, but even demonstrative evidence of the Divinity of it. I proceed to show

II. Secondly, That they conduce every whit as much towards the conversion of *Wicked Believers* to a true and steadfast practice of the *Christian Religion*. For,

First, The *holy and exemplary lives* of good Christians will be a continual *Reproach* and *Reproof* to the *bad* ones; by shewing, in themselves as in a *Glass*,

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Glass, how insincere and hypocritical they are, how unlike in *word* and *deed*, in *reality* and *profession*, how inconsistent with themselves, and how unworthy of *that holy name*, by which they are call'd. All this must evidently appear, from viewing the lives of *good Christians*, between which and those of bad ones there will be seen, at first sight, such a monstrous disparity, as will render *wicked Christians* odious and contemptible, in the sight of all men, even of such as are not Christians themselves (for all men naturally love sincerity, and a correspondence between mens actions and professions) and moreover make them, if they are not quite harden'd, ashamed of themselves, and resolve, either to shake off their *Christian Profession*, or their *Unchristian Conversation*. The *Righteous*, say the wicked, in the wisdom of Solomon, c. 2. v. 12, &c. *is not for our turn*, and he is clean contrary to our doings, he upbraideth us with our offending the Law, and objecteth to our infamy the transgressing of our education. He was made to reprove our thoughts. He is grievous unto us even to behold, for his life is not like other mens, his ways are of another fashion. We are esteem'd of him as counterfeits, he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness.

Besides, the reproof of a good life has this peculiar advantage of all other sorts of reproof, that it is not capable of being misconstrued, and so neglected upon pretence of its proceeding from personal

sonal malice, particular piques, and private interests and designs, as they are. A good life is a reproof at large, and therefore no man can say, *I am the person design'd by it*; it is the necessary means of our Salvation, and therefore no man can be so foolish as to imagine, that it proceeds from any particular spite, or ill will to him. The reproof of it is the most lively and powerful, because the most sensible that can be; and yet at the same time most inoffensive and like to do good, because it points at no particular persons, nor can be ascribed to any ill designs.

Secondly, *The Holy and exemplary lives of good Christians*, will be a continual Lesson of instruction to the *wicked*, and, having shew'd them that they walk wrong, direct them how to walk right; by setting before them, in lively colours, the exact pourtrait of a *true Christian*, sensibly tracking out for them the path they are to walk in, and going visibly before them, and, by so doing, as it were leading them on by the hand, in it. We have such a great mixture of sense with our reason, and besides are so naturally prone to imitate those of our own kind; that there cannot a greater blessing befall us, than to be surrounded with good examples; which may serve for a sensible Comment upon the laws of Reason and Religion, the better to inform our minds in them; and likewise to provoke us rightly to apply this natural inclination we have to imitate one another.

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Lastly, The *Holy and exemplary lives of good Christians* will be a continual encouragement to the *wicked*, to forsake their sins, and return to their Duty; by becoming to them a plain demonstration, not only of the possibility of practising their Duty, but also of that most desirable ease, pleasure and satisfaction, that most delightful hope, and joyful expectation, which constantly attend upon the practice of it.

And what can an erring Christian possibly need or desire more, in order to his amendment, than to be made sensible of his errors, and at once instructed and encourag'd to forsake them? This will be sufficient for his Reformation, if he be willing to be reform'd, and if he be not, nothing will.

Upon the whole then, considering the vast influence that the *holy Lives of Christians* have, towards the propagation, not only of the true faith, but also true practice of the *Christian Religion*, I think I may very justly make these following inferences.

First, That a Christian not only may, but sometimes in Duty must, so do his good works, that they may be *seen of men*, or with a design to have them seen of men: and for this plain reason, because it is vastly for the honour of God and the good

good of mankind that it should be so. 'Tis true indeed, our blessed Lord, who to the last degree abhorr'd all self-conceit and vain-glory, has commanded us not to *do our alms, and by parity of reason other good works, before men, to be seen of them*; that is to be seen of them, for that end, for which the Pharisees (to whom our Lord plainly alludes here) desired their good works might be seen, namely, purely that they might get *the praise and glory* of men, and therewith feed and inflame their *vanity and Ostentation*. But, as for those who have no other end in letting their *good works be seen*, than the Glory of God and the good of their Brethren; they are so far from being concern'd in this prohibition, that they have expresse warrants for what they do, not only from the reason of the thing it self, but likewise from many Texts of Scripture, which command them to *set their candle on a candlestick, to let their light shine before men, to be like a City on an hill, which cannot be hid, &c.*

And this I take to be, not only a plain Justification, but a very high commendation of our present meeting; that, at a time when many have *deny'd the Lord who bought them, and the love of almost all is waxen cold*, we are bold to make a publick show of our Faith and Charity; and both by word and deed openly to prove our selves the true Disciples of the Blessed Jesus; that so we may, by our example, happily encourage others.

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others to become so: and by this means effectually propagate that true Christian faith, which worketh by love, and is shewn by its works.

Secondly, Hence I infer that all the *Atheism*, *Deism*, *Prophaneness* and *Immorality*, that is now so rife amongst us, cometh very much from, and is very much encouraged by, the ill lives of us who profess the faith of Christ; or, at least, from want of that *exemplary Holiness*, which is so strictly requir'd of all Christians. It being absolutely impossible, as well from the nature of the thing itself, as from the justice and goodness of Divine Providence, that our Saviour's Kingdom should not daily be enlarged, if we were but duly careful, by the goodness of our lives, to invite into it such as *should be saved*; and, on the contrary, as impossible that the Devils Kingdom should flourish as it doth, if we did not, by the badness of our lives, plead for it, set it up, and help to support it. To remove therefore this grievous scandal, together with all the fatal consequences of it, I infer,

Thirdly, that we ought all immediately to set about reforming the World, by reforming our own lives, and so making them fit means and Instruments of reforming others.

And

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And methinks the pleasure of *turning* Souls to *Righteousness* is so truly great, the work in it self so noble, so much for the honour of God and our Saviour, and the promises annexed to it so glorious; and this way of doing this work is so easie, lyeth so level even to the meanest capacities, and is withal so inoffensive, and yet so very likely to prove effectual, that these alone, abstracted from all other considerations, ought to be a powerful invitation and encouragement to us to lead holy and exemplary lives.

Besides, as we shall receive extraordinary rewards in another world, upon account of the good we have done other men by our examples, so shall we likewise undergo extraordinary punishments, upon account of the ill we have done by them; the sins of other men being justly chargeable upon us so far, as our examples have been the occasion of them. It is therefore of the highest moment and importance to us, to abstain from every appearance of evil, to provide things honest in the sight of all men, and in all things to shew our selves patterns of good works.

But this is more especially incumbent upon us, who have had the advantages of a Religious and learned education, and, from our very infancy, have been instructed in the knowledge, and exercised in the practice, of the Christian Religion: and, by this means are better qualify'd for becoming

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coming *burning and shining lights, in the midst of this perverse and crooked generation.* If we, who have thus received many useful Talents at God's hand, are not careful duly to improve them to his Glory and the good of Mankind (the ends they were given for) we know our doom, and cannot but own the justice of it, to be *beaten with many stripes.*

Fourthly, Hence it appears that we ought frequently to contemplate the *Examples of good men*, out of which there are so many and so great advantages to be drawn. We should learn in them to see our own faults, and to mend them; to behold the Divine beauties and perfections, and transcribe them; to study God in his Creatures, his Laws in their Lives, and the direct way to Heaven in the foot-steps of them, who take exact care to tread right towards it. In one word, we should, as the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts us, *often consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works.*

And this is one excellent use we may make of our present meeting: to look round about us, and see what brave and generous Souls there are amongst us, who have been famous for *serving God, and doing good in their generation*: and immediately to take fire at their examples, and become

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come all Holy zeal and emulation: and, from this instant, to exert our utmost strength, for the overtaking, if possible, at least for the coming up to, and keeping equal pace with, these Heroick Saints, who have now so far out-gone us in the paths of virtue. There has been a time, when we have eagerly striven to rival one another, in matters of much less moment and concern; O let us not flag here, where all that we can desire, and more than we can conceive, even eternal life and happiness is, it self, at stake.

Lastly, I have but one thing more to add, and that is this: that, altho in the beginning of this Discourse I told you, that by *good works* here we are not to understand only *works of Charity*, yet we are certainly principally to understand those; and that for this plain reason, because the Gospel always placeth *works of Charity* at the head of our *good works*, these being those *good works* which God expressly prefers to *sacrifices and burnt offerings*, and which our Saviour every where declareth his value of above all others, and will at the great day of Judgment lay the most particular stress upon.

Let us then be peculiarly careful to excel in these good works, so acceptable to God, so dear to Christ. More especially now: when we are met together with a publick profession of doing good: when we are going to pay a debt, of Gratitude shall I

say,

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say, or rather of strict Justice, to that *School*, to whose tender care of us most of us owe many of the Temporal blessings which we enjoy, and all of us, in great measure, our hopes of those that are eternal: And, lastly, when we have the noblest instance and opportunity of doing good offered to us, that can be; the providing both for the souls and bodies of those who are unable to help themselves; those, who are not only of the *household of faith*, but, as it were, of *our own household* too; and that too in such a way, as shall make our Charity extend itself to the Souls of many who are yet unborn, by training up young men for the Ministry, and more immediate attendance upon mens Souls. Let us I say, having these opportunities, these encouragements, these obligations, *be glad to distribute and willing to communicate*. Let us give as freely, as we have receiv'd, and as cheerfully, as if we were yet receiving; Let us sow plentifully that we may reap so, and make use of this opportunity of doing good, as those that are not often like to meet with such tempting ones again.

To conclude all; If we really desire to show our love and respect for our *School*, as we pretend, and to give it a Character and Reputation in the world, let our good works become Advocates for it. Let the true Christian principles which we learnt there, shine forth in all our
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actions, and they will give it a sufficient Lustre. Let us prove by the largeness of our Charity, both our good will towards it, and our sense of the many advantages, which we have receiv'd from it; and, by that and all other virtues, make it plainly appear to the world, that it is indeed, what it pretends to be, and what will be its everlasting Glory, a true *Seminary for Virtue*, a faithful *Nursery for Heaven*.

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